

Acculturation of International Students in Japanese Universities

-The case of University of Toyama-

BAHAU, Simon Peter

日本の大学で学ぶ留学生の文化変容に関する一考察

—富山大学の場合—

バハウ サイモン ピーター

要 旨

Under the current global university trends along with the proposed policy for the intake of three hundred thousand (300,000) international students that the Japanese Government Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is implementing, acculturation of international students after enrolment is essential. The need is therefore on the rise while the Japanese institutions struggle to tackle the task of acculturation of the international students who are basic beginners of the Japanese language so as to conform to society and lead an informed learning engagement in their respective fields of study. The subject students registered and studying in the Intensive Japanese Language Course while taking the Nihonjijo Class or Japanese Affairs and Culture Class (JACC) at the University of Toyama are no exception. The aim of the JACC is to equip the students with basic Japanese affairs and cultural knowledge necessary to lead a fruitful study and life environment. The mode of instruction is primarily Japanese. However, depending on the viability of language or languages in class, English is utilized as an alternative mode. Moreover, in order to enhance the international students' language comprehension and composition with direct input of Japanese affairs and culture, the class takes on Japanese students who act as tutors and volunteers together with other senior international students to participate in class so that assistance and support is offered to the concerned students in their expressions of subject matter. The paper aims to explore into the adaptation and acculturation of such international students in and out of class. The results of the research are hoped to contribute to current and future improvements in acculturation, adaptation and enhancement of necessary knowledge and skills for the international students during the period of their undertaking here in Japan. The subject location of University of Toyama is no exception since it is a national university corporation affiliated university that abides by the rules and principles set out by the Japanese Government

Keywords: Acculturation, adaptation, enhancement, international students, Japanese students, Japanese affairs, culture, language

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective of the research

The research is aimed at exploring into the current conduct of acculturation in classes where the Japanese language and culture need to be acquired by international students before they venture

into their specific or specialty education. The author has been in charge of the Japanese Affairs and Culture Class which is part of the Intensive Japanese (language) Course that is offered at the University of Toyama's Center for International Education and Research (CIER) for the past three semesters since spring 2013. The international students who are eligible to register in the course have to be MEXT, Japanese Education Ministry sponsored, recommended by their home country's embassy or internally from the university, whereby the student numbers are minimal. The objective of JACC is to impart to the international students necessary Japanese cultural knowledge or intelligence primarily for studies and livelihood at school and during the span of their stay in the country. However, most of the students have zero or little knowledge of the language. Therefore, there is a necessity to intensively learn and master the Japanese language within a given period, in this case, a semester, which is roughly half a year. On completion of the Intensive Japanese Course together with this Japanese Affairs and Culture Class, most students move on to the next level of language and culture studies, too. The research will be followed on when the international students start utilizing the knowledge and skills acquired in their specialty studies, too.

1.2 The Japanese Affairs and Culture Class

The Nihonjijo Class or Japanese Affairs and Culture Classes (JACC) so far have been comprised mostly of first time Japanese language learners. The students not only come originally from a variety of countries but possess a diverse cultural backgrounds together with their own languages. So far there have been students who were recommended because their knowledge and ability of the target language, Japanese, together with alternative languages like English was in question. In one class, a variation of French and Chinese were the original languages. Hence, even English was not a viable mode for communication. To overcome this situation, classmates with better English abilities were requested to assist in interpreting but from English to Chinese. In extreme cases where the student interpreter was absent from class, instruction in Japanese with a lot of written communication was the only means. The assistance provided by the Japanese tutor or volunteer in and outside of class was an invaluable experience for the students concerned.

Below is a list of the number of students and their source of recommendation for enrollment in the Intensive Japanese Course which is a prerequisite for the Japanese Affairs and Culture Class (JACC).

Chart 1. Recommendations for entry in to the Intensive Language Course and numbers of students

	Nationally Sponsored		Embassy Recommended		University Recommended		Internally Recommend		Japan- Korea Collaboration		Total	Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Males	Females
1st Semester/ April'13- Sept.'13							2	1				3
2nd Semester/ Oct.'13- March'14	2	1			1	2						6
3rd Semester/ April'14- Sept.'14			1				2					3

Key:

M: Male F: Female

The chart below is a description of the affiliations of the international students

Chart 2. Recommendations for entry into the Intensive Japanese Course and numbers of students

Faculty/ Graduate School / Semester	Economics	Human ities	Human Develop ment (Educ.)	Science	Engine ering	Pharmac eutical Science	Male	Female	Total
1 st Semester/ April'13- Sept.'13	1			1	1		2	1	3
2 nd Semester/ Oct.'13- March'14			4	1		1	3	3	6
3 rd Semester/ April'14- Sept.'14					3		3		3

2. Previous literature

There have been numerous previous remarkable research work compiled in this perspective of linguistic and cultural acculturation of international students in Japanese universities. However, most of these superb work have been very well written in the Japanese language by again mostly authors of Japanese original who instruct and see the need and have therefore investigated deeply into the contents with much theory and practicality. The author wishes to include these previous works together with a blend of current empirical approaches in tune with the global trends surrounding both the international students, especially those students originating from traditionally close cultural settings such as the East Asian ones with similar backgrounds to non-East Asians who lack the knowledge of kanji or Chinese characters in the language and culture attached to it. On the other hand, the mode of instruction in the class is Japanese. However, to supplement and strengthen comprehension, English is utilized where necessary. Moreover, the support extended by the assisting Japanese and senior international student tutors and volunteers in the class is much appreciated. This part of the class needs further documentation for enhancement of programs for international students.

3. Objective of the Japanese Affairs and Culture Class

The objective of the Japanese Affairs and Culture Class (JACC) is to acquaint and equip the international students with the Japanese affairs and culture. It also serves as an avenue where clarification of queries or impressions of Japan, its affairs, culture and language can be done. In addition, similarities and differences between each other can also be confirmed with so as to be prepared and equipped to lead a healthy research and life environment in their localities.

3.1 Language enhancement

The international students enrolled in the JACC are also enrolled with the Intensive Japanese and Introductory Japanese Courses offered by CIER. They are required to attend classes for four (4) periods from Monday to Friday. JACC plays the role of being a breather for the students since it does not have to be strictly Japanese. However, in support of their language studies, the students are in regular contact and checked on by their Japanese counterparts and seniors who participate in class so as to utilize and enhance on the Japanese language that they have acquired in the Intensive Japanese

course. This activity also assists in enlightening the Japanese students who are participating in the class to be more aware of rediscovering, communicating and conveying their own culture using their mother tongue.

The Class is conducted primarily in Japanese. However, as mentioned earlier, the mode of instruction changes from Japanese to English depending on language viability as show in the chart below.

Chart 3. Instruction mode (Language) Proportion

Mode of Instruction (1 st month)	Japanese × 30%	English ○ 70%
Mode of instruction (2 nd month onwards)	Japanese ○ 70%	English × 30%

Key:

- Language Viability
- × Non-viability

3.2 Support for enhancement in Class by Japanese students

In this case the assistance provided here would be categorized into advising for the international student in both study and life related matters. Since the international students are living away from their homes, family and otherwise an environment more accustomed, there is a need to listen to their thoughts and provide necessary advice and guidance where possible. As mentioned by Yokota (1999) that for the “international student who does not possess the basic human relationship or social network in Japan, exchange forms the platforms to conduct support.” In addition, Tsuboi (1999) also states that “with respect to support for the international students, the domestic or Japanese students on campus provide the closest existence of such support to be extended.” As such, although programs for tutors have been established by the national university corporations since 1972, due to budgetary constraints, not all international students, including the trainee students are allocated tutors. Thus, this leads us to publicizing and taking on language volunteers for the classes to supplement by supporting their international counterparts for mutual benefits.

3.3 Cross Cultural Understanding

Experiences of miscommunication in a language and culture different from one's own can lead to misconceptions. Acquiring aspects of language alone of one culture is said to be insufficient. As such, cross cultural exchange and understanding among all parties concerned will lead to learning about each other's values. If this can be said with the international students for understanding the behavioral patterns of the host, the very same can be also said for the Japanese counterparts with regard to their guests.

3.4 Understanding of One' s Own Culture

In order to understand other cultures, one also has to have respect for their own cultures and languages. From one's own culture alone can one be able to make judgments of the other. As such the confirmation and then comparison of one's own culture to that of the other becomes a key to leading a fruitful campus life.

3.5 Avenue for Intercultural Exchange

The Japanese Affairs and Culture Class plays the role as an avenue for further exchange

activities among both the domestic Japanese students and the international students. Most Japanese students who participate in the JACC class are either tutors for the students or language and exchange volunteers who would positively like to mingle with the international students. From the class, the friendship and relationship built is carried out the community lounge of the CIER where international exchange activities such as cooking together and going for other recreational activities on and off-campus are planned and implemented. Japanese students have formed an international exchange circle which actively supports and collaborates with the international students in their conquest for adaptation to the environment and acculturation both on and off campus.

3.6 The Japanese Affairs and Culture Class (JACC)

While most classes including the students' Japanese language classes which are instructed in a teacher oriented manner, the JACC is led in a more natural style with regard to speed and vocabulary used. Since the aim of the class is to enhance not only linguistic but cultural skills, the focus is more towards the students understanding and comprehension of the contents offered together with the readiness to be expressive about the contents. It has been observed that neither Japanese nor English can be the modes of instructions because the students are mostly beginners and still studying to acquire the Japanese language. As such, the instruction mode varies from batch to batch.

Assistance is required where the Japanese and senior student language and class volunteers play a vital role. These volunteers extend support when the international students find it difficult to form words and express their thoughts in the Japanese language. The instructor has to display a certain amount of patience and understanding in this regard. As a result, only half the contents of the class can be conveyed in the beginning. Therefore, the instructor provides materials that are easily accessible and useful for the students' language acquisition and cultural adaptation.

3.7 JACC Class Procedures

The Class is conducted by firstly giving contents of the lesson prior to class with some options for students to air their views and queries about the contents. Because the contents may change, a notification of the contents for the next lesson is usually informed in the previous class so that students can prepare and search vocabulary and contents necessary for the class and discussion. The Class is held in a seminar style where students are seated so that they are all able to see each other's faces and respond to questions quite frankly.

The teacher leads the class as a facilitator or moderator, but clarifies that there can always be interruptions for to explanations or elaborations on the contents in discussion. A mini-lecture on the contents is usually given for the first half of the Class. Then questions are answered where in most cases, discussions are held on the related contents and materials. In the discussions, the teacher facilitates or moderates in a way so that all students have a fair say and participation. In addition to this, where time permits, the students are asked to share about their own cultures in comparison to those on Japan. The students practically enjoy the share session because they then all get a fair understanding only after comparisons are made. This phenomenon changes to more questions and queries and other doubtful matters as time passes by because the students' Japanese language abilities become better.

3.8 Class Evaluations and Comments

Evaluation and comments received from the students with regard to the following two questions are as follows. Question 1 reads: What opinion do you have of studying together with domestic or Japanese students? The responses were positive as such that the class was very enjoyable. The Japanese students became friends with them and were very kind. They taught them about their Japanese language and culture. The students further mentioned that the JACC class was useful for acquiring a great deal about the Japanese culture and lifestyle and its rules which are necessary for acculturation in their campus lives. Question 2 reads: Is it necessary for you to learn the customs, habits and ways of thinking of the Japanese people to live in Japan? The students replied by saying "Yes." They all said that they needed to adapt as quickly as they can to the Japanese environment and lifestyle. Therefore, they needed to be well informed in a short time span about the various contents and aspects of life in Japan.

4. Issues and Future undertakings

The issues that need addressing are such that the number of students from non-Asian or kanji Chinese character comprehending destinations is not expected to increase any more due to the current regional political issues pending. It is anticipated that more non-Asians will be coming to study in Japan. Hence, the need arises for support to be extended by way of English or a more accessible support system such as the tutor or volunteers in and outside of class. On another note, the Japanese students who assist these international students may also be interested in studying abroad. Therefore, the opportunity given to them while on home campus boost their confidence in speaking with non-Japanese students and experiencing a culture or system that is not Japanese

While this may only pose as a preliminary approach, there needs to be further research and collation of data done as a follow-up on the international students after the completion of the Intensive Language Course and entry into their major and specialty research. Concretely speaking, a survey on the utilization of the language skills acquired in the Intensive Language Course together with the Affairs and Culture Class to verify their adaptability and acculturation is a prerequisite. Only upon follow ups can one also obtain enough ground evidence to proceed on to design and coordinate a class with good assistance for effective acculturation of affairs and culture to the students concerned.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the author wishes to utilize this study to assist in the acculturation of the international students by offering a planned and coordinated support system with the Japanese Affairs and Culture Class through the assistance of the Japanese students so that while learning together, friendship and collaboration is established with mutual understanding that will hopefully accelerate adaptation. Language acquisition is always a question. However, to the international student, the problem lies in its utilization or implementation. Therefore, follow-up survey to account for whether the acquired skills are properly executed becomes an important factor in this research.

On another note, the author also wishes to invite Japanese students who wish to study abroad to actively participate in the Class. When the Japanese students participate in the Class, they are also exposed to the queries that their international counterparts embrace. The support they extend in their mother tongue will be an eye-opener for them to prepare for their own studies abroad where initial communication will be centered around self-introductions and about homeland features. In this way, a viable system can be established which is a mutual one or win-win basis. However, this still remains to be identified and confirmed.

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